

FLU VACCINE SHORTAGE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

October 19, 2004

Senator Lieberman and his staff are conscientiously monitoring the flu vaccine shortage in Connecticut (CT). We have received dozens of inquiries asking what is being done by the government. Below are some commonly asked questions and the answers we are providing to address your concerns.

Q: What is the Senator doing about the current shortage of flu vaccine?

A: *We are actively making certain that critical information flows* between doctors in CT and their local health departments regarding the flu vaccination needs of their practices. The local health departments then advise the state, and the state works with the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to help insure flu vaccine gets to the right geographic locations in our state. *Senator Lieberman has also written the Secretary of Health and Human Services*, inquiring about the obstacles to the importation of flu vaccine from other countries in order to meet our needs this season with a safe product.

Q: Where can I find useful information about the flu vaccine shortage and other related information?

A: Useful information on the flu vaccine shortage as well as information on how to prevent and treat the flu, and how to distinguish between the flu and the common cold is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

Q: Where can I find information about how to obtain a flu shot in CT?

A: The web site of the American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org) asks visitors to enter their zip codes and in response provides the locations of clinics in the area *where* flu vaccine is available. Most vaccination clinics have been cancelled, so sometimes none will be listed. Your regular provider or local health department can also provide helpful advice. The CT chapter of the American Lung Association also has a helpful web site at <http://www.alact.org/>.

Q: What is being done to prevent vaccine from being given to the “wrong” people?

A: Governor Rell of Connecticut has declared a “supply emergency” for the influenza vaccine in order to give the state authority to manage redistribution of the scant supply of vaccine and to combat price gouging.

Q. What if there isn't enough vaccine for people in the most vulnerable groups?

A: The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is now stating that there should be enough vaccine to go around *if the new guidelines are followed AND if distribution/redistribution is carefully carried out*. The guidelines are as follows:

Health care practitioners are asked to voluntarily limit the administration of influenza vaccine to the following at risk groups:

- All children aged 6-23 months
- All adults aged 65 years and older
- Persons aged 2-64 years with chronic medical conditions
- All women who will be pregnant during the flu season
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Children 6-18 months on chronic aspirin therapy
- Health care workers involved in direct patient care
- Out of home caregivers and household contacts of children under 6 months

Q: My doctor doesn't have enough flu vaccine to give me a shot and I qualify?

A: Be patient. The CDC is working closely with Aventis/Pasteur, the one remaining major supplier of vaccine, to gradually and carefully release the remaining 25 million doses of vaccine that have not yet been distributed. Use common sense and don't stand in line for a vaccine if you are not feeling well. Wait until your provider has the vaccine.

Q: Shouldn't I be getting my flu vaccine right now?

A: The flu season does not usually hit aggressively in CT until the end of November or December, so there is still plenty of time for high risk patients to receive vaccine. Laboratories in CT have not yet identified any seasonal increase in flu diagnosis – in other words, *it's not here yet*.

Q: I usually get a flu vaccine, but I am ineligible this year. What should I do?

A: Follow common sense hygiene measures to prevent acquisition or spread of disease. These include frequent hand washing, avoiding contact with those who are sick, staying home when ill, and covering one's mouth during sneezing or coughing. More details are available from the CDC website: www.cdc.gov.

Q: Why is it that Canadians have flu vaccine and we do not?

A: Canada has its own vaccine manufacturers, as do many other countries. The FDA has stated that it is examining the safety and efficacy data of a Canadian manufacturer to see if its vaccine could be brought into this country to help manage our shortage.